

**Frequently Asked Questions on the Development of the Communications Elements
for the MyPyramid Food Guidance System
August, 2005**

1) What were the communications goals for the revision of the original pyramid and development of the MyPyramid Food Guidance System?

The primary communications goal was to encourage improved dietary and physical activity behavior among American consumers. Although most consumers recognized the original pyramid, only a small percentage of them followed it in its entirety.

2) What was the overall plan for the revision of the original pyramid and development of MyPyramid?

The revision of the original Food Guide Pyramid was conducted in two phases – a technical reassessment and communications development.

Technical Reassessment:

The technical reassessment included updating the original pyramid's daily food intake patterns (recommendations on what and how much to eat) to assure that the science base was up-to-date.

- The food intake patterns were revised to meet new nutritional standards, including new energy requirements, and to reflect present food consumption patterns and nutrient content of foods.
- The process and results of the technical reassessment were posted in the September 11, 2003, *Federal Register* (68 FR 53536) for review and comment. Comments were solicited on the proposed new food intake patterns from health and education professionals, government and industry scientists, and the American public.
- The technical reassessment was also discussed with the 2005 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, and the new food intake patterns were finalized after incorporating their input.
- USDA received widespread support for the science-based revisions proposed for the food intake patterns.
- These new food intake patterns form the basis for USDA's new MyPyramid Food Guidance System.

Communications Development:

The communications strategy for the MyPyramid Food Guidance System was designed to provide consumers with a system of motivational and educational tools to help them implement its recommendations. The system was planned to include:

- a new motivational symbol and slogan that would remind consumers to eat a healthy diet and be physically active, and encourage them to find more educational information in print or via the Internet at mypyramid.gov;
- clear and concise nutrition messages for educational materials like posters, brochures, and the Website that communicate the new food guidance

recommendations in ways consumers can more easily understand and put into practice; and

- interactive activities to help consumers personalize their diet and get more information on topics of interest to them.

3) What was the process in the development of communications elements for the MyPyramid Food Guidance System?

There were several steps in the development of the communications elements.

- **Written and oral stakeholder input** –A second *Federal Register* notice (69 FR 42030) was posted on July 13, 2004, to outline USDA’s plans for the communications strategy for the new Food Guidance System and provided the public an opportunity to comment orally and in writing. The notice included the conceptual plan for the graphic design and proposed consumer messages. Comments received were used to help focus the design and development of both motivational and educational aspects of the Food Guidance System.
- **Design** – New graphic concepts and slogans were developed under contract with oral and written input from the Federal Register Notice, baseline research on consumer understanding and use of the original Pyramid, a second round of consumer research to explore understanding of terms and concepts for use in the development of educational materials, and a review of the literature on recent successful communications efforts.
- **Consumer testing** –As part of the design and development process, all graphic concepts were tested with consumers.

4) What types of consumer research were conducted in the development of MyPyramid?

Six rounds of consumer research were conducted to obtain consumer feedback to help guide the development of the new MyPyramid Food Guidance System. Focus groups and Web-TV surveys were conducted with several hundred total participants. See Consumer Research Overview for a more complete research breakdown.

5) What were the overall objectives of the research?

The objectives of the research were:

- to assess consumer understanding of the concepts and messages from the original Food Guide Pyramid
- to obtain feedback on how consumers use the pyramid to make food choices and identify any barriers they face
- to assess how consumers understood potential new Food Guidance System messages and the potential appeal and perceived usefulness of these messages to consumers
- to explore consumers’ response to prototype concepts for a new graphic symbol and slogan for the Food Guidance System.

6) How many and what kinds of graphic images were tested?

The graphic images used for consumer research fell into one of three categories: pyramid based, pyramid influenced, and non-pyramidal. A total of 10 potential

images were focus group tested with consumers. See Summary Report for more information.

7) What has the public response been to the MyPyramid.gov Website?

MyPyramid.gov statistics:

- Over 45 million file hits the day of the rollout (April 19, 2005).
- 65 million file hits the next day (April 20, 2005).
- About 200 million file hits by the end of the first week.
- Over 670 million file hits to date (July 25) on the MyPyramid.gov Website.
- Most Website visitors have stayed for about 10 minutes or more.
- People from 183 individual foreign countries visited the Website.
- The majority of the visitors were from the general public (97.5%) followed by educators (1%) and organizations (1%). The rest were Federal employees.
- Over 7,000 email communications have been submitted, with the vast majority expressing enthusiastic approval. A most frequent comment has been a request for more information.

8) What percentage of Americans can access the Internet in the United States?

- 75% (204.3 million Americans) of U.S. households have Internet access at home, according to the February 2004 Nielsen/NetRatings Survey.
- 99% of public schools in the U.S. had access to the Internet in 2002, according to the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics.
- 95% of public libraries provide access to the Internet, according to the American Library Association.

9) Do low-income consumers access the Internet for health information?

For a related project in 2004, USDA examined the results of a survey conducted with women ages 20-40 who can be classified as low-income, according to WIC income eligibility guidelines. The findings were that access to and use of the Internet as a health information delivery channel by low-income women has skyrocketed over the past few years. These women were as likely or more likely to use the Internet for health information in comparison to the general population. The low-income women ages 20-40 indicated that the Internet was their most frequently used media source for health and nutrition information.

10) Will consumers change their diet based on the new Food Guidance System?

The design for a system of food guidance materials was created to encourage behavior change. While we cannot yet assess behavioral changes on a population basis, the anecdotal evidence from consumer feedback to USDA is encouraging. Users of MyPyramid.gov have reported that it is helping them to make positive changes in their diet and exercise behaviors.

In addition, a poll on use of MyPyramid was conducted by WebMD in April, 2005, shortly after its release. Consumers were asked, "how likely are you to make changes to your diet based on the new food pyramid?" Twenty-six percent of respondents

stated they were very likely to make changes in their diet based on the new food pyramid, followed by 35% stating they were somewhat likely, and 39% stating they were not likely at all to make changes in their diet. Based on this survey, 61% of respondents were likely to change their diet based on the new MyPyramid.

11) What is USDA planning in the near future for the MyPyramid Food Guidance System?

- Parameters are being established to conduct formal evaluation of the MyPyramid.gov Website. Periodic evaluation of the effectiveness of the MyPyramid Food Guidance System will help USDA further improve and enhance the tools and information for consumers.
- A child-friendly version of MyPyramid and an interactive tool will be released shortly for elementary school-aged children.
- Implementation is a multi-year process, and the public and private interest in promoting and educating Americans is vital. Parameters are being established for official partnerships.
- The MyPyramid Website is being translated into Spanish.